

Korean Churches in New York and New Jersey Offer Heart-Healthy Meals to Members

by: Catherine Choy

SUMMARY

As of September 2015, 1,500 members of 3 Korean churches in New York and New Jersey have access to healthier church meals. The faith-based organizations introduced changes to help combat high blood pressure among Korean Americans. Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS) educated church leaders, kitchen staff, and other church members about healthy eating and high blood pressure through workshops, tasting events, and other resources. The work was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



CHALLENGE

About 1 in 5 Korean American adults have high blood pressure, a dangerous condition that increases the risk of heart attack, stroke, kidney damage, and other serious health issues. Few people know when this “silent killer” is a threat, though, because high blood pressure often has no warning signs or symptoms. According to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, Asian Americans are less likely to be aware of high blood pressure or have their

cholesterol levels checked than most Americans. A diet rich in vegetables and low in sodium can help prevent or treat the condition. However, changing individual behaviors and eating healthy foods can be difficult if healthy options are not available in the communities where people live, work, play, and worship. KCS and the New York University Center for the Study of Asian American Health (CSAAH) partnered to address this challenge.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

According to CDC, more than 19,000 deaths among Asian Americans in 2013 were due to major heart disease, of which high blood pressure is a leading risk factor. Faith-based organizations can help combat this “silent killer” by connecting members to heart-healthy choices. To learn more, check out 100 Congregations for Million Hearts at <http://millionhearts.hhs.gov>. CSAAH also provides access to culturally-tailored health information at <http://www.med.nyu.edu/asian-health/research/reachfar>.

"Our members are happy with tastier and healthier meals. I'm supportive and thankful the program is influencing health conditions among our church members."

- Pastor Young Chang Kim, Hyo Shin Bible Presbyterian Church of New York

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SOLUTION

The partners formed a coalition to help prevent heart disease among Asian Americans in the New York City metropolitan area. Goals included increasing access to healthy foods and culturally-tailored health education in faith-based organizations. According to the Pew Research Center, between 70-76% of Koreans in the U.S. attend church. KCS led workshops about managing and preventing high blood pressure and reducing sodium intake at three local Korean churches. The coalition also held recipe tasting events and cooking demonstrations that promoted healthy alternatives to traditional Asian dishes. Church leaders were then given a list of nutritional changes to consider when serving meals on site.

RESULTS

As of September 2015, 1,500 people have access to healthier church meals because of the coalition's educational efforts at these 3 Korean churches. Each of the faith-based organizations now provide one or more of the following choices when food is served on site:

- At least one whole-grain option;
- At least one low-fat or non-fat dairy option;
- At least one fresh fruit option; and/or
- At least one leafy green salad or fresh vegetable.

Other changes include making sure water is always available and providing low-sodium dressings and condiments. The churches also display posters about the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables, provide members with healthy recipe booklets, and continue to host tasting events and high blood pressure awareness workshops.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Moving forward, the coalition plans to reach an additional 39,000 Korean Americans by helping Korean supermarkets in New York and New Jersey implement healthy changes over the next 2 years. Strategies will include offering coupons for healthy foods; placing healthy products at eye-level and near the front of the store; and increasing the labeling and promotion of healthy foods. For example, KCS has already established partnerships with several local Korean supermarkets, including H&Y Mart—one of the biggest Korean supermarkets in New Jersey. Participating stores have started selling a discounted healthy multi-grain rice recipe that includes the KCS logo and slogan "Eat Healthy, Stay Young!" This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement.